

Barbie Lane

FOR GIRLS

**MYSTERY of the
EGYPTIAN MUSEUM**

15¢

No. 5



BY LUCY CARTON



A BARBIE LANE MYSTERY



MEET BARBIE LANE!

Here she is, the most adventurous teen-ager you've ever known. Barbie Lane, a pretty sixteen year old red head, is the daughter of the world famous photographer, Richard Lane. As her father roams the country on special assignments, he takes his brave daughter with him . . . and the red-headed girl finds herself in the midst of more exciting mysteries than you could imagine.

MEET LANE

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MYSTERY of the EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

BY LUCY CARLTON



CHAPTER I

A STRANGE CURIOSITY SHOP

"LOOK, JOAN!" Barbie Lane gasped. "We're going to hit that cart!"

Joan Webster, a dark-haired girl of fifteen, dropped her magazine. The two girls

watched in helpless terror through the bus window, as a hay wagon, drawn by a plodding horse, creaked over a dirt crossroad scarcely half a mile ahead.

"Hold on, folks!" The alert driver cut sharply to the right as he shouted the warning and the big bus careened wildly, horn blaring.

The horse reared and whinnied in terror. Yanking the reins desperately, the farmer halted the beast. The sleek steel sides of the vehicle passed inches from the snorting frightened animal.

"We're leaving the highway!" a lady screamed.

A tree suddenly loomed ahead. The girls and the other passengers braced for the impact. It came with a jolt, a sound of splintering wood, flying baggage and then a steady hiss of escaping steam from somewhere underneath the bus. The bus had come to a halt at a crazy angle along the sloping shoulder of the road.

Within seconds Barbie was out of her seat. The pretty sixteen year old redhead was as keen and quick-thinking as her father, the celebrated free lance photographer Richard Lane. Her eyes searched the long compartment. A small elderly man riding in the back seat had vanished beneath a tangle of suitcases that had fallen from the overhead racks. She heard a faint cry for help.

Barbie struggled up the tilt-

ed aisle, followed by Joan, the driver, and several other passengers. "Oh, the poor man," Barbie said, hurriedly removing some of the smaller suitcases. The driver lifted the heavier ones. One of the larger valises had become wedged between two seats and had actually sheltered the passenger from the other pieces of falling baggage.

"Are you all right?" Barbie asked.

The gentleman shook his head to clear it and then smiled kindly. "I don't believe there are any broken bones, thank you. That makes me pretty lucky at my age." He fumbled in his jacket pocket for a moment. "Why even my glasses are safe."

"Here, let me help you up," Barbie offered, extending her hand. He was slight of build, yet wiry and energetic. As Barbie helped him to his feet and brushed off his clothes, she noticed him staring at her with dark piercing eyes.

"I think you'll be all right now, Mr. . . ."

"Wilson's the name. Thank you kindly. You're a very cool headed girl."

After making certain all the passengers were uninjured and comfortable, the driver climbed

down to make a quick inspection of the damage.

He returned shortly. "Nothing serious, folks. One of the cooling pipes is cracked. Go back to your seats and I'll try to get her back on the road. There will be a short delay at our next scheduled stop, Milltown, while temporary repairs are made." Then good naturedly the driver added, "The town is a very old mining settlement and has unusual sights and strange shops. Your stop-over should be an interesting one."

Barbie turned to her friend, Joan. "This trip is certainly beginning in an eventful way," she said. "I wonder what will happen next?"

"With you around," laughed Joan, "anything can happen!" Her eyes sparkled with admiration. "I've never known anyone who attracts adventure as much as you do."

It was true. Barbie Lane accompanied her father on many of his photographic assignments, and these often led to fascinating adventures.

This time Mr. Lane had received an assignment to photograph a fabulous Egyptian exhibit loaned by leading museums all over the world to the Collins City Museum of Art. The girls were on their way to

join him at Collins City. With summer vacation at hand, Barbie and Joan had felt it would be fun to see the museum before taking their planned camping trip.

Neither girl realized they were about to step into one of the most exciting adventures of their lives.

The girls settled back in their seats. Milltown was ten miles from Collins City, and the bus just limped along.

"Milltown. Approaching Milltown," the driver announced. The bus rounded a curve and they could see the quaint old store fronts of the town's shopping district.

A loudspeaker in the depot announced that the delay would be no more than half an hour. "All passengers continuing to Collins City, please be in your seats in thirty minutes," the announcement ended.

Barbie and Joan decided to go exploring. "Oh, look at those shops, Barbie, will you. They're so lovely and quaint," Joan exclaimed.

"Here's just the place," Barbie said, stopping in front of one of the stores.

"Look at the funny old lettering," Joan giggled. "And what an odd name!" The window sign read:

SULEIMAN CURIOSITY SHOP

Joan peered through the window. "Gosh Barbie, it looks kind of dark in there." She seemed hesitant.

"Come on," Barbie urged her companion, and gave the ancient door knob a turn.

The door creaked open and a gust of musty air rushed out at them and made them cough. They blinked once or twice at the sight before them.

Within, the shop was dark and extremely cluttered. No attempt had been made to keep it light or free of dust and cobwebs. In the rear, the hulking figure of a man stood behind a counter waiting on a customer. Old lamps, bric-a-brac and hand carved utensils lined the crowded shelves. The floor was filled with dilapidated colonial furniture, old cradles and one large spinning wheel. There were some other objects which the girls did not recognize at all. Some broken bits of gadgets seemed to be strangely foreign.

Joan wanted to leave but Barbie smiled reassuringly and walked in. Joan followed. As they approached the counter the customer turned around.

"Look!" exclaimed Joan.

"Why, it's Mr. Wilson,"

Barbie smiled.

Wilson, however, seemed startled for an instant, as if he had been caught off guard. Then the elderly gentleman just as suddenly became composed. He smiled. "Ah the bright young lady. And her lovely friend. Whatever are you doing in this old store?"

"We find antiques as interesting as you apparently do, Mr. Wilson," Barbie answered.

"I *do* find a sort of fascination in knick-knacks and sometimes I entertain thoughts of buying them, but I'm far from an expert. Now Mr. Johnson here," he pointed to the huge clerk looming over the counter, "he runs the shop for Mrs. Suleiman, the owner. He could tell you whatever you wanted to know."

The massive clerk leered when he heard the praise. He seized a delicate china lamp base in his tremendous hands and began polishing it slowly with a rag.

"Ugh," Joan whispered to Barbie, "He looks as if he would just as soon strangle someone with those hands. He frightens me."

Barbie, too, thought the immense man seemed ridiculous and out of place in the curiosity shop. "He looks more like a

gangster," she mused.

In the next instant, as though in answer to her thought, a high pitched shriek cut through the air. It seemed to come from the back room. A man and a woman could be heard arguing behind the closed door. The man shouted. When the woman replied, she spoke half in English and half in an exotic foreign language. Joan and Barbie were shocked at the unexpected outburst.

Then the door behind the counter flew open. A wiry little man with flaming red hair burst from the room, an ugly sneer on his face. He turned. "I couldn't help it," he shouted. "It's the last time I do anything like that for you! Not for that price!"

He pushed his way past the counter and stormed roughly towards the girls, bumping violently against Barbie. She fell back towards the jagged edge of a broken antique chest. Joan screamed. Groping for balance, Barbie clutched the little man's coat. The top button came off in her hand. He rushed out the door.

"Wait, mister!" Barbie called after him. "You lost a

button." She ran to the door. He was gone.

All at once Mr. Wilson was behind her. "Just a minute!" he shouted.

For a moment Barbie thought their fellow-passenger was trying to get the red-headed man's attention. But then a hand seized her shoulder, holding her with an iron grip.

Barbie turned in amazement. The hand belonged to Mr. Wilson. He was staring at her and once more his eyes were piercing.

"Don't try to get away, Miss!"

Barbie dropped the button in her pocketbook and confronted Mr. Wilson.

The man seemed on the edge of fury.

"I don't understand," she said, perplexed. "What's wrong?"

"You know perfectly well what's wrong, young lady!" Wilson shouted.

"What have I done?" she pleaded.

"What have you done!" Wilson screamed. "You're a thief! That's what you are!" He glared accusingly. "You stole my wallet!"



CHAPTER II

THE CURSE OF RAMA KHAN

BARBIE STARED at her accuser, Mr. Wilson's eyes bored into the purse slung from a shoulder strap at her side as he repeated the charge: "You stole my wallet!"

"Oh, no. No! You're wrong. Mr. Wilson. Terribly wrong!" Barbie protested.

"You may search my purse if you wish," she said finally, and held it out to him.

From within the dark doorway behind the counter, and unknown to Barbie, a second pair of gleaming eyes were focused upon the purse. Before Mr. Wilson could accept Barbie's offer, a woman emerged from the doorway. She was slender and small and moved slowly towards them. Her cocoa-powder face told of a Near

East ancestry. They watched her approach.

"One thousand pardons," she said, in a sort of labored English with foreign sounding overtones. "I feel that the storm of voices to which you have been unfortunately subjected has disgraced this humble adobe of barter. I am Mrs. Sulciman, the proprietress. The unhappy fellow who made his undignified exit but a few moments past, is the cabinet maker who fixes these antiques for me." She gestured in the direction of the furniture. Many of the pieces, Barbie noted, were in a sad state of disrepair.

"After performing his skills in a most wretched and miserable manner," the lady continued, "this carpenter demand-

ed twice the payment due him! Oh, that such a thieving infidel should be wished upon me!"

"No surprise," Mr. Wilson shot back. "The town seems to be a paradise for thieves. First that fellow," he pointed towards the street, "and now this young upstart of a girl." And his finger came to rest facing Barbie.

"One moment," said Mrs. Suleiman, extending her hand for silence. "The girl is innocent of your charges."

"How can you say that?" Wilson roared. "I know I had that wallet when I came in here. She's the only one who..."

Again Mrs. Suleiman cut him short. Smiling and nodding, she bent down and reached beneath the spinning wheel. "Is this object that reposes so peacefully upon the floor, familiar to you, sir?"

Wilson's mouth dropped. Mrs. Suleiman's narrow shaking fingers retrieved the wallet and held it before him.

"I...I don't quite know quite what to say," he stammered. "I feel so foolish and ashamed. You see the wallet contained my travelling funds. When I realized it was gone I became panicky for a moment. I let my temper get the better

of me."

Barbie was far from certain of the man's explanation. Still, her instinctive good nature gave him the benefit of the doubt. "I understand, Mr. Wilson. It wasn't your fault and there's no need to apologize. You missed the wallet and thought you saw me drop it into my purse."

At that moment, the hoarse



acceleration of the bus engine carried down the street and reached the ears of the party in the shop.

"Oh my gosh," Barbie exclaimed. "We completely forgot what time it was. Our bus must be leaving."

The girls and Mr. Wilson hurried out the door. The Collins City Express was pulling out of the depot a block away.

"Wait! Wait for us!" Joan yelled, waving her scarf.

They dashed for the station with Mr. Wilson puffing along behind.

The bus began to move down the block. They called frantically, but their voices were drowned by the noisy exhaust. The girls watched, powerless to act, as the bus became a silver speck on the highway to Collins City and then disappeared over a rise.

"Oh dear," Joan worried. "What's your father going to think when we're not on the bus?"

"Perhaps he hasn't left to meet us yet. I'll call his rooming house from the depot."

While Joan checked the later bus schedules, Barbie placed a call to Collins City. She was relieved when the telephone was picked up after only two rings.

Barbie breathed a sigh of relief. Soon her father's welcome voice was asking her where she was. She told him all about the bus accident and Mr. Wilson's wallet and their missing the bus. "I feel like a real chump, Daddy."

"You should," he joshed. "Now don't wander off under any circumstances. You and Joanie wait right there for me.

I'll pick you up in my car."

"You know how fidgety Joan can get."

"Buy her one of those fancy fashion magazines," Mr. Lane suggested, before he hung up.

Barbie felt better already. She bought a copy of the latest issue of *Fairstar* because it contained several handsome poses of Joan's latest rage, Rod Dash the movie actor, modeling lounging jackets. Barbie had another reason for buying the magazine. She took special pride in the little credit lines under the pictures. Many of them read, *Photos by Richard Lane*.

Joan pored over the pages, ogling the latest vacation togs while Barbie watched for her father. When Mr. Lane arrived, he parked outside and came directly to the waiting room.

"Hi, dad," Barbie called, running to meet him.

"How's my darling daughter?" he laughed. "And little Joanie!"

"Hi, Mr. Lane. And fifteen's not so little," Joan protested.

"All right, you two grown women. Let's go. I want you to see Collins City before night-fall."

Barbie noticed Mr. Wilson seated on another bench. He was watching the clock with a

sad face. He looked so dejected that she felt sorry for the elderly man.

"Say Dad," Barbie inquired, "Can Mr. Wilson drive to Collins City in our car? There won't be another bus for several hours."

Mr. Lane agreed at once. Barbie called to Mr. Wilson. He shook hands with her father and readily accepted the invitation.

Before many miles had passed, Barbie sensed that something was wrong. Her father had not spoken since they left Milltown. She was a good judge of her father's moods and knew that the world famed photographer was not given to long periods of thoughtful brooding. She almost thought she could detect a frown on his face.

Barbie decided it would be best not to question her father

until they could talk in private. She was sure his worried expression had something to do with the Egyptian exhibit.

Joan was less tactful. "I can hardly wait to see those silver scarabs and things. When is the exhibit opening, Mr. Lane?"

Barbie's father shook his head sadly. "I don't know, Joanie. I'm not sure when it will open."

"Gosh Mr. Lane," Joan continued. "I thought the date was all set."

Barbie gave Joan a little kick in the heel.

"A date was set," Mr. Lane said. "Now it may never open. I really can't say much more," he finished firmly, indicating that the matter was closed for the present.

Everybody who knew Mr. Lane regarded him as a frank, outspoken man. If he was acting mysterious, he had good



"Don't forget to read the stories about Davy Crockett in these **TRIPLE NICKEL BOOKS**. They're all about me, an' the scrapes I got myself into ... an' out of! Remember **TRIPLE NICKEL BOOKS** about **DAVY CROCKETT**. They're great."

reason. Most likely, Barbie assumed, he didn't want Mr. Wilson to hear what happened. It must be terrible. She gazed fearfully at the approaching suburbs of Collins City.

"Oh, Mr. Lane," Mr. Wilson remarked, "Is one of the museum exhibits, the mummy of Rama-Khan?"

"As a matter of fact we do have that particular sarcophagus. The mummified remains of Rama Khan make up one of the most valuable displays."

Mr. Lane related the information without hesitation. Several newspapers had already carried listings of the exhibits and the presence of the Rama-Khan was public knowledge.

Mr. Wilson took a cigar from his pocket, snapped off the end and spat it out the window. He had what appeared to be a smug scheming expression on his face. "Mr. Lane," he huffed, "I think you're in trouble. Bad trouble. What's more I think you know it. Yet I wonder if you realize just how much you're up against."

This brazen outburst was too much even for Barbie. "What does he mean, Dad?" she

pleaded.

"I'm not quite sure myself what Mr. Wilson has in mind," Richard Lane replied, cautiously. "Suppose we let him tell us."

Wilson grinned. "I'll be only too glad to share my thoughts." He paused, lit his cigar, took a long draw and exhaled slowly. "I'm talking about the Curse of Rama-Khan!"

Joan's eyes grew wide. "A curse!" she thought with terror. "A mummy's curse!"

Mr. Lane reacted in a somewhat different manner. The furrows in his face turned to a grin. "Is *that* all?" He began to laugh. "Mr. Wilson, you almost had me worried for a moment. I never thought a grown man...oh, this is too funny for words."

Somehow, Barbie thought, even this laughter seemed forced. She looked from her father to Joan. Her younger friend had grown pale.

The streets of Collins City were reaching out for them like a net. Joan stared ahead. "Mr. Wilson," she stuttered, "what is the Curse of Rama-Khan?"



CHAPTER III

MARK OF A MANIAC

"**L**EGEND has it," Wilson began, "that Rama-Khan, to protect himself swore to wreak horrible vengeance upon anyone who dared to desecrate his tomb. The curse, inscribed in hieroglyphic writing over the doorway, warns that the spirit of Rama-Khan will rise on quiet nights and bring dreadful harm to the offender."

"That's just silly superstition," Barbie argued.

"Maybe so," warned Mr. Wilson. "But every explorer and curator who ever had any dealings with this mummy, later fell victim to great misfortune."

"What happened to them?" Joan asked.

Instead of answering, Mr. Wilson looked out the car win-

dow. "I seem to have arrived at my rooming house," he said. "Won't you stop the car, Mr. Lane?"

Mr. Lane parked at the curb and the elderly passenger thanked them for the ride and walked to the vestibule, carrying his bag.

"But Mr. Wilson," Joan called after him, "What about the victims?"

Mr. Wilson had disappeared into the house.

Joan turned to her friend. "I hate to say this Barbie, but I'm kind of scared."

"Now, Joan," Barbie admonished, "Those silly old superstitions don't mean a thing and you know it. Tell her how wrong she is, Dad."

Mr. Lane, however, re-

maintained grim-faced and quiet until they pulled into the driveway of their rooming house.

"Let's each take a suitcase upstairs and we'll talk after you've unpacked," he suggested. The girls pitched in and had their luggage put away and all the clothing hung neatly in short order. Mr. Lane joined them in the room that was to serve as his temporary dark-room.

"I don't believe in these curses any more than Barbie does," he said. "Whatever has occurred can be explained by logic and reason."

"Then something has happened!" Barbie ventured.

"Yes. A very strange occurrence took place some time last night at the museum."

Barbie and Joan huddled closer together on the couch and listened.

"The displays are not yet complete. Several new ones arrive every day. We had planned to open the museum galleries to the public next week.

"This morning, when the museum doors were unlocked we found the most incredible thing. On many of the statues and paintings of people, the *left hand* had been s l a s h e d, scratched or pulverized. Even

the bandaged left hands of the mummies were gashed."

Barbie was stunned. "Why would anyone have committed such a senseless crime?"

"I wish we knew," her father admitted. "Mr. Lemming, the curator, believes it was the work of a maniac."

"What do the police say?" Joan asked.

"We don't dare tell them. If word ever reached the contributing nations and the people who raised thousands of dollars to help support the collection, the museum would be in terrible trouble."

"The person who did it, how did he get into the building?" Joan asked.

"That's the strangest mystery of all," Mr. Lane confided. "The doors are heavy bronze panels. They were triple-locked. I have one key. Mr. Lemming has the key to the second lock and the chief guard holds the third. All three have to be present when the exhibit is unlocked."

"What about the windows?" Barbie asked.

"Because the collection is of such enormous value, extra heavy bars have been placed on all the windows. We checked them this morning. No one had been tampering with them."

Barbie pursed her lips in thought. "No one could have entered the museum," she murmured, "and yet this strange thing happened. How is it possible?"

"I know," quavered Joan. "It must be the mummy's curse."

Even though Barbie refused to believe in such superstition, she couldn't help but shudder at the thought. She asked her father when they could see the damage.

"Tomorrow," he said. "Meanwhile you girls can assist me in preparing a darkroom. I've put up some heavy black drapes and I plan to develop the prints and negatives right on this table."

Barbie hardly needed instructions. She helped unpack the developing trays and packages of powdered developing chemicals.

She checked the supplies methodically. "You'll be needing more high contrast paper, Dad," she announced.

"I'm printing some negatives tonight," he said. "We can get some supplies in a photography store on Main Street."

Barbie and Joan were eager to see the town and offered to make the short trip. They tossed on light wraps and left

the rooming house. The sun was beginning to set.

In the nearby town park, the girls could see the stately and majestic silhouette of the Collins City Museum of Art. Joan wanted to see the building from close-up but Barbie insisted they complete their errand first.

The purchase took but a few moments. As they left the store, Joan's eyes froze. "Oh Barbie! That man coming out of that supermarket across the street. I think he's that same horrid little man we bumped into in the antique shop. The one with the red hair. And I think he's seen us!"

"Where?" Barbie searched the street. "I don't see anyone."

"He ducked behind that car. No. He's gone."

"Are you sure it was the same man?"

"I couldn't be positive. It's getting so dark. I just saw him for a moment."

Barbie was inclined to be skeptical. "I do believe that story about the curse has you jumpy. Come on. We'd better hurry if we want to see the museum building before it's completely dark."

They hurried through the streets towards the museum.

The vast edifice seemed to grow in size as they approached. The building was set in a small park. A shimmering lake reflected the museum in the early moonlight. The two girls paused at the edge of the pool swept away by the beauty of the scene.

All at once the pool reflection blurred, as if someone close at hand had kicked a pebble into the water. This was the only warning the girls were given.

Before she could move, Barbie felt a hand grip her arm and wrench the pocket-book away. The strap tore and came free. Barbie screamed.

A figure whirled and fled. Joan darted after the fleeing shadow with Barbie at her heels. "Thief! Stop!" she cried. The purse snatcher weaved in and out of the foliage. Grotesque shadows confused the pursuers. Out of breath, they stopped to rest in a clearing.

"Hhsst." Barbie noticed a nearby branch swaying against the wind. "Quick," she panted, still out of breath. "I think he's behind that bush." They inched forward through the leaves and peered into the branches.

"Is he stuck in the brambles, Joan?"

"No, I think he's rummaging through the purse."

The thief had his back to them. He seemed to be groping for something.

"Now!" Barbie yelled. They plunged into the thicket. The purse snatcher yelped with surprise and dropped the purse. He fled through the thicket.

Barbie retrieved her pocket-book. Her tiny personal flashlight was still in its compartment. She flicked the beam around the handbag's interior.

"My money's all here," she said with surprise. "He doesn't seem to have touched anything!"

Joan peered over her shoulder. "Are you sure?"

"I think so," Barbie said, puzzling over the contents. "I can't seem to recall. . . Wait a minute! I have it! The button is gone! He stole the button!"

"What button?"

"The button I pulled from the coat of that ugly little man with the fire-red hair, in Mrs. Suleiman's shop."

"Are you sure?" Joan repeated.

"There's nothing else missing," Barbie asserted. "He went to all that trouble just to get the button!"

The two girls looked at each other in amazement.



CHAPTER IV

PHARAOH'S REVENGE

JOAN WANTED to tell Mr. Lane of the strange theft at once. Barbie, however, said no. She would not cause her father undue worry while he was in the midst of an assignment.

The incident continued to bother Joan. At breakfast the next morning she created a stir by saying she had lost all interest in seeing the Egyptian collection. Barbie cajoled her into admitting that a fear of the curse was behind her decision.

"All right, I'll go with you," Joan promised. "But I won't go near that Rama-Khan mummy. I won't even look at it."

They drove to the museum in Mr. Lane's car and pulled up in the driveway. Climbing the huge flight of steps leading to

the entrance, Joan repeated her vow.

They paused under the portico. The great bronze doors were closed. Mr. Lane glanced down the row of columns.

"Here comes the curator, Mr. Lemming, with the chief guard," he said.

Lemming, a scholarly gentleman with a small white goatee, strode briskly into view. Barbie thought he looked every bit like a retired explorer. He waved a greeting. "Good morning, Dick," then catching sight of the girls, he added, "I see we have some charming company."

Mr. Lane exchanged salutations and hoped there had been no new trouble.

"We'll soon know," Lem-

ming remarked, removing a long key from his vest pocket. Mr. Lane produced a similar key and the guard, a third. These were inserted, one at a time, in two door locks and a concealed base lock mechanism. Two electric motors whirred. The massive doors moved inward and the guard went forward to make his rounds of inspections.

"All clear," he called after several minutes. The party advanced into the lobby.

"Oh, it's magnificent," the girls chorused.

"You're welcome to look around," Mr. Lemming said, cordially. "Just don't touch any of the damaged items. Your father has probably told you of our troubles."

"We'll be careful, Mr. Lemming," Barbie promised. "If you'd rather, we'll just visit the undamaged rooms."

The curator thought that was a good idea. "All the rooms on the right are intact," he said. "The jewelry collection, some of the paintings and our four best mummies escaped the madman's knife. You'll see them all, including the priceless remains of Rama-Khan. I guess his old curse was too much for the intruder to reckon with."

"I wish he wouldn't joke about the curse," whispered Joan.

Mr. Lemming had not heard the dark haired girl's remark. "When you've finished looking around," he said, "your father and I will join you in the basement cafeteria."

Joan appeared to forget her fear as the girls walked from display to display.

"Let's go on to the jewels," she suggested. She ran ahead into the next gallery.

"Oh no!" Barbie groaned when she followed her friend into the room. Joan had blundered into the mummy chamber. What was worse she was heading straight for a highly ornamented casket and mummy case. Anyone could see the lettering on the floor plate read RAMA-KHAN!

Joan stopped in front of the open case. "Look at this, Barbie. This wooden chest is really a work of art."

Barbie realized that her chum did not know she was standing in front of the very mummy she feared. The red-haired girl had difficulty restraining a smile, when she suddenly heard a strange noise.

She looked up. Over the mummy display, on a small balcony, stood a heavy granite

sphinx. The noise, a low scraping sound, seemed to be coming from that direction.

"What was that?" Barbie asked, eyeing the darker recesses of the balcony.

"I didn't hear anything."

A trickle of gritty sand began to sift into Joan's hair. It poured over her face. Joan looked up and froze to the spot.

"EEEEeeeeeeek— Barbie—it's falling on me! The red sphinx is falling!"

The stone face, with its twisted leer and animal body, teetered precariously on the ledge, and then toppled forward.

"Jump!" Barbie screamed. Joan fell away in a faint.

The immense brooding sphinx hit with an echoing thud, cracking the floor. Jagged lines radiated from the point of impact.

Joan looked up, dazed. "Oh, Barbie," she began to cry. "That mummy I was standing near. It was the Rama-Khan. I knew it. I wanted to show you how brave I was. I even touched the case. Now, the pharaoh wants his revenge. It's the *pharaoh's revenge*, the curse is after me," Joan wailed.

Barbie stared at the floor where the sphinx had hit. Her friend's narrow escape fright-

ened her. She blinked and looked a second time. Suddenly, her eyes widened. "Joan, look! On the floor!"

Joan wiped away her tears. "Why, it's a button," she stammered. "It looks just like the one you pulled from that angry little man's lapel!"

Barbie stooped, picked up the button and examined it. "I'm almost positive it's the same size and color," she said. She stared at Joan. "Maybe that's why the other one was stolen from my purse last night! So we couldn't match them if we found this one!"

The girls dashed from the room and hurried down to the cafeteria.

"What's the matter?" Mr. Lane asked, looking up from a table as the girls entered. He noticed how pale and terrified Joan looked.

"A statue fell from the balcony," Barbie said, "and almost hit Joan."

Mr. Lemming jumped to his feet, horrified. "Where was this?" he asked.

"In the mummy room."

"Why that's the sphinx that was delivered only yesterday! Those stupid workmen. They must have left the rollers underneath. The slightest vibration might have set it rolling. Even

a small cough, echoes in a room like that could have toppled it. What a dreadful accident." He apologized profusely for the scare the girls had received and promised that immediate precautions would be taken to prevent any similar mishaps.

Barbie studied Mr. Lemming's face. His explanation seemed logical. He was an expert and he should know what had caused the fall. Then she opened her hand, and displayed the button.

"We found this on the floor near where the sphinx fell," she said. While her father and Mr. Lemming listened intently, the bright teen-ager re-told their visit to Mrs. Suleiman's curiosity shop in Milltown. "While we were there," she explained, "a man had a squabble with Mrs. Suleiman. He lost a button when he stormed out of the store. I saved it in my handbag."

"And last night," Joan added, giving one last sniffle, "Someone tried to steal Barbie's purse. But all he took was the button."

"I hadn't wanted to alarm you, Dad," Barbie explained. "At the time I wasn't sure the button had any value."

"Let me see the button," the

curator demanded, extending his hand.

Barbie placed the button in Mr. Lemming's wide palm with some reluctance. He took a jeweler's glass from his pocket and examined the object.

"Elkhorn. Common variety," he said. "I'm afraid you haven't much of a clue for yourself, Miss Lane. Thousands of these are manufactured every day. Many of our workmen wear the same buttons on their coats. You're allowing your friend's close accident to influence your thinking. I'd suggest you simply forget about the button."

Barbie eyed Lemming suspiciously.

"And as for that Mrs. Suleiman," he continued, "her stage trappings seem to have fooled you both. I know that Egyptian woman and her curiosity shop well. She's nothing but a fake. She makes her living selling counterfeit antiques."

There seemed to be nothing more to add, and the girls decided to return to the rooming house.

Joan was only too eager to leave the building and its memories. She began to dawdle, however, once they were out of the park.

They walked slowly towards the rooming house. Without

any warning. Barbie suddenly pushed Joan behind the trunk of one of the large trees that lined the residential streets of the city.

"Hush," Barbie cautioned. "Do you recall this street?"

"It looks familiar."

"This is where we left Mr. Wilson. He's staying in that house."

Joan remembered the squat building, the only one on the street without a porch. Set far back from the sidewalk, it possessed but a single low step below the door.

"Look through the trees but keep out of sight."

"That's Mr. Wilson! He's pushing something."

"I think it's a wheel chair."

They slipped cautiously to a closer tree for another look. What they saw set Joan shaking once more. She clasped Barbie's hand for support.

Wilson was guiding a wheel chair with the utmost care, rolling it ever so slowly over the cracks in the pavement. The sight of the passenger sent chills racing through the girls. Wilson came closer. He seemed tense and watchful. At intervals he would pause and turn quickly, as if to see if he were being followed. A woman swayed back and forth in the chair. She was garbed totally in black. Heavy clothes swathed her like a turban. Wilson approached, unaware of the watching girls. The woman's face, they noted, was so well veiled that none of its features was visible.

"What can it mean?" Joan breathed.

"There's only one way to find out," Barbie said, determined.

Barbie had already stepped casually out, as if she had just



"Have you read any of the **POWER BOYS** books yet? They're terrific! Ted and Steve Power are pals of mine, and we get into one exciting adventure after another as they track down news for their father's newspaper. Don't miss any of the **POWER BOYS** books."

come from the other side of the street. Joan watched, half paralyzed with her own fears, yet filled with admiration for her cool-acting friend.

Barbie confronted Mr. Wilson. "Hi," she said, trying to make the greeting casual.

Mr. Wilson managed to mask any surprise. "Good afternoon, Miss Lane," he replied, bringing the chair to a gradual halt, then tipping his hat. "I would like you to meet Mrs. Wilson, my wife."

He indicated the woman seated in the chair. She nodded in silence.

"She's in mourning for her father," he explained. "Her recent grief at his passing aggravated an old ailment. I try to see that she has as much rest as possible," he said, turning the invalid's chair into his rooming house walk.

"You're very thoughtful," said Barbie. "I'm pleased to have met you, Mrs. Wilson."

Mr. Wilson unlocked the door and rolled the chair inside. The door latch clicked shut behind them.

Joan sprang from behind the tree and rushed to Barbie's side. "Wilson's really up to something," the red haired girl said. "I'm sure of it. I'll tell you when we reach the house."

Joan could hardly wait for Barbie to close the door and relate what new discovery she had made.

"What is it? she implored. "What did you find out? Who was that woman all in black who couldn't walk?"

Barbie sat down, her heart beating rapidly. "I think we're on the verge of some big discovery," she said. "Mr. Wilson introduced that lady as his sick wife."

"But why the black clothing?"

"He said she was in mourning for her father, but I don't think he's telling the truth!" Barbie said with conviction.

"She was wearing a ring over those tight-fitting black gloves. I got a close look at it. An Egyptian scarab was mounted on the band."

"What does that prove?" Joan asked.

"Mrs. Suleiman was wearing the same ring when we met her in her shop!"

"Are you sure?"

"I'm positive."

"I still don't understand," Joan said puzzled. "What are you getting at?"

Barbie lowered her voice. "I think Mrs. Suleiman and that woman hiding behind the veil are one and the same person!"



CHAPTER V

A BRAZEN DENIAL

IT WAS a confusing turn of events. Joan's mind was in a whirl. "It's terrible," she complained. "Something scratching the left hand of all the exhibits! Mr. Wilson pretending Mrs. Suleiman is his wife! A sphinx almost killing me! That man stealing that button from your purse!" She buried her face in her hands. "It's too much!" she wailed. "It must all be part of the mummy's curse!"

Barbie paid no attention to the younger girl's complaints, but lifted aside the window curtain and scanned the homes and gardens along the street. "I have a hunch we can find that purse snatcher," she began.

"In this big city?"

"That little man with the fire-colored hair is our best

hope because he probably wants something we have—the second button. If he is the purse snatcher, all we have to do is locate him and confront him with the button. Then we'll know for sure."

"But how will you find him?" wondered Joan.

"Remember the chase in the park?"

"I won't forget it. I'm still fixing the rips in my coat."

"That thief," Barbie went on, "seemed to know just where to run. He was familiar with every path and exit. He probably grew up near here and knew the park all his life. There's just a chance our landlady, old Mrs. Courtney, might recall the scoundrel. Let's find out."

They knocked timidly on the landlady's door a few moments later. Mrs. Courtney opened it a crack and peered out.

"Oh it's the two girls from upstairs," she said with an inviting smile. "I was just setting the table for my afternoon tea. Do come and join me."

As soon as tea had been poured, Barbie brought up the question of the button.

"I do believe one of your neighbors dropped this," she said, showing the button to Mrs. Courtney. "He was a sort of little man with a terrible temper and a kind of face that always looked mean. There was a little scar on his cheek and he had...."

"Oh my goodness," said Mrs. Courtney cutting her short. "Now let me see."

The girls knew it was a wild stab and waited tensely for her reply.

"I have so many neighbors," she said, thinking. The girls waited.

"But I don't think any of them have buttons like that one," she said, finally.

Joan and Barbie despaired.

"You must have seen him," Joan said. "He had the reddest hair. It almost seemed to be on fire."

The flighty woman paused.

"Why I do believe you're looking for Mr. Egan," she said with conviction. "Yes, he would be the one. Too bad he didn't lose the coat along with the button. He probably stole it from some one in a crowded restaurant."

"What do you know about him?" Barbie asked.

"Well," Mrs. Courtney bent forward and her eyes gleamed with a love of gossip. "He's a no-gooder. That man is absolutely worthless. Been a ne'er do-well ever since I can remember him. Can't hold a job. Worked in a bank once, as a porter, I recall. Then he got that sewer job. They never lasted." There was no stopping Mrs. Courtney now. "The man was always in trouble with the law, too. And his poor sister Sarah, let me tell you! Oh, she's the maid in Mr. Abercrombie's house. The way she was always going to the police for her brother. It's such a disgrace. And Mr. Abercrombie is a highly respected man. There's none finer in town."

After receiving the information the girls said they would really have to be on their way, and took leave of the informative landlady.

As they climbed the staircase to their room she called

after them. "On second thought, it couldn't have been Mr. Egan's button. He's been away from Collins City for many years. I heard he was in jail, least-wise that's what Mrs. Carter heard Miss Phelps, her cleaning girl, tell Mrs. Snediker's butcher."

Joan's heart sank. But Barbie's mind was made up. "Rumor or not," she told her friend, "We're going to Mr. Abercrombie's house and talk to his maid. And we're leaving right now!"

The Abercrombie residence was well known in Collins City. The name alone brought a respectful "Yes, Ma'am," from the taxi driver Joan had called.

The route led away from the congestion. A fine residential neighborhood appeared. They drove past large homes and mansions with long black cars in their drives.

These eventually gave way to open suburbia. A small lane branched away from the road ahead. It was bordered on both sides by enormous but well trimmed hedges. Barbie guessed they were at least ten feet high and quite thick. Not more than four feet off the ground, a small modest black sign carried the name ABERCROMBIE in thin gold letters.

The driver slowed his cab. "Shall I continue to the door?" he asked.

"We'll walk, she decided, not wanting to stir up any fuss with the owners. "I don't think our visit calls for a grand arrival." She paid the bill and they requested that the driver return for them within the hour.

Barbie was about to lift the knocker on the side door when she heard footsteps from within.

"Quick," she told Joan, "Behind the hedge!" The girls scurried for cover.

The door opened several inches. Someone looked out, waited several seconds and slipped from the house. The figure made for the hedges. In the brief moment of exposure a glint of bright red flashed in the sun.

"It's Mr. Egan!" Joan exclaimed. The little man paused for a moment to catch his breath after the dash.

Barbie thought fast. If the button was important, Egan would certainly give himself away by his actions, were she to flip it over the hedge. No time to worry. Over it went.

The button hit the drive directly in front of Egan and began to roll.

"Huh?" He looked around, saw no one and then noticed the button. He gave chase. Slammed his foot down and stopped it. Removing his foot he picked the button from the road and examined it closely.

"Found it!" he shrieked aloud. "It must have been in my cuff all along."

Glancing over his shoulder to make certain he was unobserved, he hurried down the lane.

Convinced she was confronted by the spectacle of the purse-snatcher admitting his guilt, Barbie dashed, furious, to the other end of the hedge. Joan followed. Here they waited for Egan to make his appearance.

The suspect reached the end of the bushes quickly. Barbie stepped out and blocked his path. She was joined by Joan.

"What the—," Egan stopped

in amazement. Recognizing the girls, he attempted to brush past them.

"Not this time, Mr. Egan," Barbie cautioned.

"Step aside," he warned moving menacingly forward.

Barbie stood her ground. "Not this time you, you purse snatcher!" she said, accusingly.

"Oh, so that's it," Egan sneered. "Some one took your purse and you're trying to pin it on me."

Egan's face turned the color of his hair. "You'll have to answer for that charge," he warned. "That's not only a lie about me, it's slander against my family name. I've just come from visiting my sister. I consider your remarks an insult to her as well!"

The little man lifted his hand threateningly. "Stand back now," he warned, "or I'll be forced to use violence. You're



"If you want to see how I cleaned up Hays City, an' Abilene . . . if you want to find out how I scouted fer the Union Army . . . buy the newest **TRIPLE NICKEL BOOK** an' read about it in 'The Life of **WILD BILL HICKOK**.' "

always in my way!"

Fearing more for Joan than herself, Barbie stepped aside. Egan walked brusquely away.

"That does it!" Barbie said. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this. We'll go right to Mr. Abercrombie and tell him his maid is harboring a suspected criminal."

They walked around to the front entrance of the house where the driveway circled back into itself, and they proceeded up the front terrace stairs.

The door was opened by a sweet looking young woman wearing a maid's cap and carrying a duster.

"It's the butler's day off, May I be of service?" she asked.

"Yes," Joan piped up. "We're here to see Mr. Abercrombie."

"He's having a late lunch," the woman explained. "Won't you come into the sitting room and wait."

They were led into a large room well stocked with books, paintings, and the largest upholstered chairs the girls had ever seen. The maid asked

them to be seated. Joan and Barbie sat uneasily in the oversized chairs.

"Did you wish to see Mr. Abercrombie with reference to something important?" The young woman asked. "I can bring a message to him now if you like."

"Are you Sarah Egan?" Barbie asked.

"Yes."

Barbie Lane decided to trust to the girl's good sense and reason. "We're here about Mr. Egan," she said quietly.

The maid dropped her duster. "My... brother" she asked, hesitant and unbelieving.

"Yes, Miss Egan," Barbie replied. "We'd like to ask you some questions about him. We just saw him outside."

"That's not possible!" answered the maid.

"It's true," Joan remarked calmly. "And he told us he had just been here talking to you."

"But it's not possible, I tell you," the maid repeated sharply. She paused for a moment before she spoke. "My brother's been dead for three years!"



CHAPTER VI

PRISONERS OF THE MUMMY

STUNNED by Sarah's reply, Joan looked to Barbie for their course of action. Clearly the maid was lying. She should be confronted with the evidence and accused at once. The amateur girl sleuth, however, had apparently decided not to reveal the encounters with Egan just yet. She remained silent and her expression made perfectly clear that she expected Joan to do likewise.

The maid regained her composure bit by bit. She drew herself up to her full height. "My brother's actions have been a source of great distress to me in the past," she said defensively. "All my life people have come to me seeking him. Some accuse him of thievery. Other times visitors claim he has

tricked them out of their funds. I am sorry to say the list of callers has been long and unending."

Her voice assumed a begging tone. "Only have mercy! Don't mention my brother to Mr. Abercrombie. The master of the house is angered by even the very mention of his name. If you say anything at all, he will fire me."

The girl's fright was real enough and it touched Barbie deeply. Logically, she told herself, Sarah was protecting her brother. Still her plight was genuine. Joan, too, seemed moved to pity. Undecided what to do, the girls stared at the maid, trembling in misery before them.

Their dilemma ended with

unexpected suddenness. From somewhere behind the high-backed chairs a voice called,

"Whom have we here?"

When Joan and Barbie leaped from the chairs, quite startled, a white-haired gentleman with puffy red cheeks stepped forward chuckling heartily. He was impeccably dressed in finely tailored dining clothes.

Before the bewildered girls could begin to reply, Sarah stepped between them and the man. "They came to see your collection, of course, Mr. Abercrombie," she explained. "They told me they had heard about it in the city and just had to see the objects for themselves."

The man turned to the girls. "Well?" he asked, awaiting their confirmation.

Barbie and Joan introduced themselves and then Barbie added that the maid had indeed described the purpose of their visit.

"I'm flattered but not really surprised," he said. "I should have expected that the daughter of Richard Lane would call to see the famed Abercrombie collection."

Barbie was speechless at his reference to her father. Joan also was startled. Mr. Abercrombie smiled when he noticed

their surprise.

"I am a dealer in ancient and medieval art," he explained. "I have many valuable statues and paintings in my home and I'm on the board of trustees at the museum."

"Then that's why you know of my father," Barbie said.

Their host nodded, and then turned without warning to the maid. "You may go, Sarah," he instructed, quietly.

The maid cast one pleading look at Barbie and Joan. Barbie smiled to show her she needn't worry.

With a great display of charm, Mr. Abercrombie proceeded to conduct the girls on a tour of his collection. The acquisitions were, for the most part, scattered throughout the rooms and connecting corridors of the large house. Each drawing room, the dining area, library and study were utilized by Mr. Abercrombie to tastefully display his prized possessions.

Barbie and Mr. Abercrombie stopped to admire a particularly fascinating picture which she recognized as bearing the brushstrokes of a famous old master. Joan, walking on alone, turned at a bend in the corridor and continued without them. A short distance ahead

the hallway branched off it in several directions. Joan chose the opening at the farthest left and disappeared down the corridor.

"Say where's your friend?" Mr. Abercrombie asked, missing Joan.

"I think she went on to the next corridor," Barbie reasoned.

The owner of the house seemed suddenly flustered. "We must find her at once!" he exclaimed with extreme agitation. Without further explanation, he seized Barbie's hand and dragged her after him through the hallway. Reaching the point where the corridors split, he looked first into one and then another. He saw Joan Webster vanishing through a doorway, far ahead.

"Come back," he called. "You might get lost!" He released his hold on Barbie and hurried after Joan. Barbie followed behind, wondering at the unusual warning he had sounded. Can it be that the house is larger than it appears? As she caught up with them, the reason for Mr. Abercrombie's actions became clear.

The room Joan had inadvertently entered was not really a room. It was a half-room. Across its mid-section,

a wall of steel bisected its area, sealing off whatever lay beyond. The center of the wall was fitted with a locked door of heavy metal.

Mopping his brow from the chase, Mr. Abercrombie beckoned the girls close to the wall. "This is my new vault," he confided. "A royal ransom would be safe here. But I wouldn't want people to know about it. The story might leak out and tempt the underworld. Of course, they could never crack this safe but they could make trouble. I know both of you will respect my confidence."

The girls assured him they would not mention the vault and he led the way to additional exhibits.

The tour was soon completed and they all returned to the entrance hall. Here, Mr. Abercrombie paused briefly near a small glass cabinet filled with jewels.

The sparkling stones naturally attracted the attention of the girls. Barbie walked over to the case to examine them at close range.

"Hsst, Joan, look!"

Joan bent forward and gaped.

Resting on a small silk pillow was an Egyptian scarab

ring of familiar design.

"I've seen that beetle carving before," Barbie whispered. "It's the same ring that was on the finger of Mrs. Suleima and Mr. Wilson's invalid wife!"

With a look of only casual interest, she remarked, "Oh, by the way, Mr. Abercrombie, what sort of strange looking ring have you got on that pillow?"

"Oh, that," he said. "The wearing of this particular type of ring used to denote a princess. However, many duplicates have been found and imitations made. So now it has become so common that almost all its value has been lost."

Following his explanation, Mr. Abercrombie helped the girls into their coats and saw them to the door. Their taxi was waiting in the driveway. "Where to now?" Joan wondered.

"The Collins City Museum of Art," Barbie instructed the driver.

The cab lurched forward and rolled out of the estate grounds. The driver pressed heavily on the accelerator as they entered the highway.

After they had been traveling for several minutes, Barbie noticed they were on an un-



familiar stretch of road. They seemed to be headed away from the center of town. The position of the late afternoon sun confirmed her suspicions.

"Driver, are you positive that this road leads to the museum?" she asked.

"What say?"

"Are we going the right way?"

"Yes Ma'm."

Apprehensive and suspicious, the girls watched anxiously through the cab windows. Scarcely moments later their fear turned to amazement. They were approaching the Collins City Museum of Art via its back entrance.

"How did we get here this way?" Barbie asked.

"It's all quite simple," the driver explained. "We took the new speedway that circles the

suburbs of Collins City."

Seeing the chagrined expressions on the girls' faces the driver grinned. "Don't feel badly. Many old timers who've been away from Collins City these past few years, really get fooled when I take them on that new super highway."

They paid the driver, thanked him for his fast services and entered the museum.

Mr. Lemming was seated, hard at work on some papers, behind the reception desk. The curator put aside his writing when he heard the girls approach.

"Your dad is busy photographing some of the damaged statues in one of the rear exhibition rooms," he said. "He should be finishing today's shooting in a short while. I don't think he'll mind if you watch quietly."

They thanked Mr. Lemming and entered the galleries. With Joan sticking close by her side, Barbie led the way through the interconnected exhibits leading to the rear of the museum. Many of the galleries were new to the girls and several times they found themselves walking two and three times through the same room. The layout was quite confusing.

Eventually they reached the room where the statues were on display. In the center of the high ceilinged gallery, two racks of lighting equipment, mounted on tripods were standing, abandoned. Mr. Lane was nowhere to be seen. They peered into the surrounding rooms, but these were empty.

"We must have passed him when we were going in circles through those galleries," Barbie realized.

They hurried through the slowly darkening galleries, attempting to retrace their steps to the entrance hall. Passing through one of the rooms, a display attracted Joan's attention.

She stopped. "Oh, Barbie, come look!" she called, giggling.

"What is it?" Her friend joined her with a puzzled look creasing her brow.

"See," Joan said excitedly. "Look what I've found. Here's the cosmetics exhibit. Why those Egyptian women wore more make-up than we have today." A series of blue marble jars filled with make-up oils and set in a chest with a polished silver mirror, enchanted Joan. "Oh, what I wouldn't give for a set like this," she dreamed enviously.

Barbie lured her away with the promise that they would return tomorrow.

Unfortunately they made two more wrong turns before finding themselves in a familiar hall. By the time they reached the entrance ten minutes had gone by.

"This is strange," Joan observed, "I don't see anyone waiting for us."

"And the doors, they're closed," Barbie said, perplexed. They hurried over to the huge bronze panels. Barbie placed her shoulder against one and pushed.

"Ouch." She rubbed a bruised shoulder. "They're locked all right. I imagine everyone has gone home."

Locked! The word tingled with apprehension in Joan's ear. A tremor of fear ran up her spine. "How...how will we get out?"

"I don't know. They only open from the outside."

"Are you sure?"

"My dad said so, remember?"

Joan searched about for an escape. "The window...what about the window?" she demanded.

Barbie reminded her they

were barred. Gradually the extent of their plight dawned on Joan. "You mean we're locked in for the night?" she asked with a slight tremble in her voice.

Barbie nodded gravely. "I'm afraid so."

Joan gulped and looked for a way out. Advancing shadows reached for her from every corner.

A desperate fear was gnawing at Joan inside. Soon the great museum would be shrouded in black.

"The lights!" she shouted with sudden hope. "There must be a way to turn on the lights." Her eyes searched feverishly and lit upon an electric wall switch. She clicked the button to the ON position. Nothing happened.

"The lights don't work," she complained, shuddering.

As if in answer, the silence of the hall was harshly broken by an indescribable screech. The inhuman sound cut through the room and Joan panicked. Holding her hands over her ears to shut out the ghastly noise she screamed, "We're trapped! We're trapped by the mummy's curse!"



CHAPTER VII

THE INTRUDER

THE frightening screech faded into silence. Almost at once it was replaced by the sound of bellowing oxen. Joan fled to the doors and pounded with her fists in desperation.

"Let us out! Let us out!" she called.

Cool-headed, Barbie quickly realized that the sounds had started when the switch was thrown. She walked to the wall panel and shut off the switch. The noises stopped immediately. "It was only a silly recording," she told her friend. "Just sound effects for the exhibit."

Joan became calmer but continued to bang against the doors and call for help.

"It's no use." Barbie told her. "We're too far away from any other buildings. No one

can hear us. We might as well make up our minds that we're going to be here until morning."

The younger girl found it hard to resign herself to spending the night in the museum that housed the curse of Rama Khan.

"If we're going to get any sleep at all, we'd better make ourselves comfortable with some blankets," Barbie suggested. Joan didn't see how they were going to be anything but miserable. The floors were bare marble and the benches were stone.

Then Barbie remembered that the authentic slave hut in the first room was furnished with some woven reed mats. She suggested they make their

way between the darkened exhibits and try to find the hut.

Frightened, Joan agreed to the plan. They joined hands and using Barbie's pocket flashlight, the girls groped through the blackness.

"This is the pyramid exhibit," Barbie said. "We've gone too far in the room. The hut is back the other way. Turn around and let's get out of here."

"I can't," Joan said. "I'm stuck. The heel of my shoe is caught between two of the stones."

"Slip your foot out of the shoe," Barbie instructed.

Joan tried and tried. At last her foot slipped loose. She gripped the shoe firmly and yanked.

"I have it," she said, "but the heel has come off." She crawled out of the passage and strapped the shoe back in place. Barbie joined her. The broken heel slowed their progress, for Joan now had to limp slightly to avoid straining her ankle.

Finally they found the hut and squeezed through the door one at a time. Everything was as Barbie had remembered.

"And we can use our coats for blankets!" Barbie enthused. She bundled herself in

her coat and placed two thick-nesses of mats down for a mattress.

Joan followed her example. "I don't know how these Egyptians were able to sleep on this stuff," she said. "It's rough and I'm uncomfortable."

"Hush, go to sleep."

After several minutes Joan was still wide awake. "Say Barbie, what if that mummy *does* come to life at midnight?"

"Joan, if you make one more silly remark like that I'll write a report on this adventure when we get back to school and every word you say will be in it, because you wouldn't want me to lie." Barbie was only spoofing of course, but she had to get Joan to fall asleep.

"All right. Goodnight." Joan forced her eyes to remain tightly closed. Eventually she dozed.

While her friend slept peacefully, Joan's slumber was filled with troubled nightmares. She tossed and turned in fitful restlessness. Her sleep was very light.

At midnight the huge bell in the nearby Collins City Hall began to toll the hour.

Joan stirred and sat up in a daze. What was that noise? Only a clock tower, she told

herself. She turned over and buried her head in the mat. Suddenly she heard it again. Was she imagining something or was there another, different noise? Between the chimes she thought she could detect a strange scratching sound.

She listened again. "I do hear something!" she decided, and nudged her companion.

"Barbie, get up! I hear something."

Barbie Lane stirred. "Go back to sleep, Joan," she murmured. "You're having a dream."

"No," Joan insisted. "I do hear an odd noise. 'It's right here in the museum. I know it is.'"

Barbie rubbed her eyes, shook the sleepiness from herself and sat up. She listened. "I don't hear anything."

"It stopped."

Just then they both heard the noise. This time it was somewhat louder. It seemed to be coming from next gallery.

They leaned forward, alert.

"That noise is from the mummy chamber," Joan cried, shivering at the realization. "Oh Barbie. What if the c-curse is true? Suppose the mummy has really come to life?"

Still half asleep, even Bar-

bie felt a sudden twinge of fear at the thought. Once again they heard the noise.

Joan huddled in her corner of the hut. "Maybe if we keep very still it won't harm us," she prayed.

"We don't dare stay here," Barbie chided angrily. "Whatever that noise is must have something to do with the mystery. This is our chance to help the museum."

"But it's so dark out there," Joan whimpered. "The flashlight will give us away."

"We'll have to feel our way," said Barbie. She concentrated and formed a deliberate picture in her mind of the way the museum floor plan looked by day. She concentrated on the location of each pillar and case.

"I'll lead the way," she told Joan. "Don't let go of my pocketbook strap."

They waited until the scraping commenced once more and Barbie slipped out of the hut on her hands and knees. She waited for Joan and then cautiously moved out across the floor. Her memory did not fail her. She made each turn slowly, with her hands outstretched to keep from stumbling against an exhibit.

As they approached the

room, the noise became clearly defined—then stopped, and began again.

Finally they reached the open doorway separating the two galleries. They flattened against the wall and peered into the room.

Barbie felt Joan's hands tightened on the bag strap.

Her own breathing became as fast as her rapid heartbeat.

A dim greenish light from a hidden lantern played over the room. A tremendous, mummy-like shadow was moving across the opposite wall. From its up-raised clutching hand the blade of a long dagger extended across the space of the wall. The arm moved slowly back. For an instant its motion hypnotized Barbie. Then she remembered Joan and turned. In the sickly light she saw Joan's jaw dropping, almost in slow motion, as if she were going to scream. Barbie cupped her hand over her friend's lips and held fast.

She signalled for Joan to remain quiet and insisted that they sneak closer.

The shadow of the arm moved forward in a rapid slashing motion.

The girls darted into the room and ran behind the base of a large statue. From here

the entire chamber was visible, and the source of the menacing shadow was revealed to them.

A fuzzy outline of a figure was moving among the exhibits, with hurried, sinister gestures.

Barbie tiptoed from her hiding place and dropped to the floor. She inched closer to the weird goings-on. The intruder was using his knife on every exhibit in the room. The left hands on the statues and paintings in the room were being methodically cut and scratched.

Barbie tensed. Here, before their very eyes, the unspeakable desecration that had filled them with such wonder was taking place. Once again the mysterious senseless act of attacking the *left hands* in the display was taking place. She winced as the palm of a wooden statue was scratched by the rampaging figure.

"Why ~~is~~ he doing it?" Barbie wondered. "There's no reason."

Suddenly the vandal turned and for a brief instant Barbie feared she had been seen. But the figure had another reason for its actions. Now it turned to the four mummies spared in the previous rampage.

The hand reached out for the first mummy. Two quick slashes and the bandage on the left hand was slit. On it went to the next, and then the third. The fourth mummy was that of Rama Khan.

The figure paused before its huge, open case. The hand seemed hesitant to strike. Then it made up its mind and lunged.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeek!" Joan screamed.

The dagger hand stopped in mid-air. The figure whirled about. It was a man. A thin eye-mask covered his identity.

He scurried for the lantern, seized it, and ran toward them. The girls ducked. When they looked up he was vanishing down the hallway.

"He thinks we're the curse," Barbie said. "Come on!"

Barbie and Joan were too excited to think of their safety. They plunged into the darkness after him. The light bobbed up and down ahead.

They ran on—Joan stumbling because of her broken shoe heel. Reaching the steps, they looked down the stairwell. Their man was scurrying down the flight leading to the basement.

The girls followed. Joan almost tripped, as the heel on

her good shoe caught on a step. She stopped, pulled off both shoes, and hurled them down the staircase. They clattered noisily, giving the impression of more than two pursuers.

The figure stopped, and looked up. The girls hunched into the shadows. He leaped the remaining steps and fled into the basement.

The girls reached the landing and wondered which way to turn. Joan thought she saw a momentary flash directly ahead and they followed the main corridor. Barbie flashed her light along the wall.

"Now we know!" she exclaimed. She held it at one position. Joan looked. Swinging in the beam was the metal grill covering a large ventilating shaft.

There was no time to think. Barbie held back the grating and looked into the opening. Her flashlight met a black void below. From it, a cold, damp column of air swept against. She dangled her feet and could feel nothing.

The red haired girl looked at her companion. She set her lips in a tight line. "Joan," she said, "we're going in after him."



CHAPTER VIII

THE SECRET AT THE TUNNEL'S END

THE DROP was fortunately short. Hardly more than four feet from where the tips of their toes dangled as they hung down from the grating.

Barbie flicked the button on her pocket flashlight. It was fast dying. The feeble beam reflected a glistening wet brick tunnel, extending as far as they could see in both directions from the shaft.

"It's an old abandoned sewer!" Joan exclaimed. They listened for their quarry.

The foot-steps of the fleeing intruder splashed in the distance. He was already far ahead of them.

"Come on!" Barbie urged.

The girls blinked several times to orient themselves to the dim light and plunged for-

ward. Their footing was slippery, however, and they were forced to grope along, guided by the vandal's noisy retreat.

"Mrs. Courtney told us that Mr. Egan once worked in a sewer!" Barbie recalled.

"He could easily have devised this scheme to break into the museum," her friend reasoned.

The footsteps ahead grew faint.

"We'll have to hurry," Barbie warned, "or we'll lose him."

They sloshed through small pools formed by seeping rain-water.

Several hundred yards ahead the sewer connected with a secondary underground flow pipe. Its diameter was quite

constricted in comparison to the first tube. Reaching it, the girls were beset with confusion.

"Could he have taken that smaller passage?" Joan wondered.

"He would have to crawl on his hands and knees to get through," Barbie said. "Let's listen." She bent down and cupped her ear against the wall of the smaller sewer.

"Something is slithering along up ahead in there. We'll have to go one at a time."

To set the example Barbie crawled ahead without hesitation, and entered the pipe. She could hear Joan right behind her. There were no obstructions visible in this smaller, twisting passage, and Barbie's many years of assisting in the darkroom gave her a confident sense of her ability to navigate in the dark.

"I'm turning out the light," Barbie called to her friend. "We have to conserve what power is left. We may need it later."

Joan was reluctant to agree, but realized it was the only sensible action. They would rely on the narrow curving walls and Barbie's judgment to guide them.

Even so, the sudden shock of being fully immersed in

darkness in an unknown passage deep below the earth was terrifying. What lay beyond the blackness, neither girl knew. Joan began to feel that each step was taking them further away from the museum and bringing them closer and closer to some frightful doom. With each movement forward she expected to hear Barbie tumble into a bottomless pit.

The passage widened suddenly without warning, and Joan unknowingly crawled ahead of Barbie in the darkness. Once more the floor took on a darkness that sent shivers racing through them.

Joan reached out to feel for a drier surface. She brought her hand down on furry warmth.

A soft squealing mass came chattering to life. She jumped back, colliding with Barbie, and yelped in fright.

The precious light flashed on. The remaining battery power sent a ray of light across the floor. "Sewer rats!" she shouted.

Several large brown rats were scurrying underfoot. The rodents bared white chisel teeth and their tiny black eyes squinted hatefully at the beam. Barbie held the light steady and they turned and fled, bur-

rowing into small crevices and cracks in the floor.

The pursuers took advantage of the light to explore their present position. Looking on ahead, their hearts sank. The widened cavern was no more than an old collecting basin in which the runoff tube emptied its overflow. It ended scarcely ten feet ahead, in a huge, mud-filled hole. Had it not been for the rats they would have blundered into the excavation.

Painfully, they began to retrace their steps back into the small overflow pipe and through it to the junction. Although the return trip was also made in total darkness, the girls moved with direction and confidence. The part of the route already covered held no more terror for them.

At last they felt the spaciousness of the main tunnel opening around them.

First Barbie and then Joan cautiously crawled out the overflow tube and stood up.

"Oh, we can stand again!" Joan cried, overjoyed. "I never thought a sewer could be so welcome."

Another dilemma faced the girls. Should they return by way of the museum or continue on in the direction taken by

the fleeing figure. Barbie decided not to chance the risks of the unknown tunnel ahead. They would return through the old sewer line and follow it back to the museum. She pressed the flashlight button. The faint light flared orange for a moment and died. The last reserve charge from the tiny batteries was gone.

Now they would have to move on ahead. In the total darkness they would never have known when they reached the point in the tunnel where the ventilating shaft opened overhead.

Hand in hand, they set out. Without the reassurance of their light each step was filled with apprehension. They reached out into a void, searching to make sure the ground ahead was solid. Their hands explored the walls carefully to assure them that they weren't blundering into any more dead ends. Several times Joan slipped and had to grapple for balance against the invisible walls.

"If we avoid the smaller routes and stay with the main tunnel, it's bound to lead us somewhere," Barbie reasoned.

A short distance ahead they did reach another overflow channel. This time they

ignored it and groped onward. The appearance several minutes later of an upgrade in the path of the sewer seemed to confirm their strategy. They hurried on. Although the tunnel dipped slightly once or twice, it was obviously approaching the surface. Fresh breezes swirled through the passageway and spurred them on.

By now, however, Joan's feet were numb and painfully chilled. The knowledge that they would soon be safe slowed the urgency of their pace. To conserve strength they paused, sat down and rested. Joan massaged her feet briskly. Barbie would almost have been content to remain here and wait for daylight, but Joan was unwilling to spend any more time in the depressing atmosphere. She gave her toes a final rubbing and they moved on. Soon Barbie was certain the end of the pipe was near. The usual night sounds of birds, crickets and a truck on a distant highway were clear. Barbie seemed to sense overtones in the whistle of the wind. Joan too, thought she heard something but couldn't quite make of the confused noises, distorted by the hollowness of the pipe.

Something else was outside, close at hand. They moved further along the pipe. The sound was a mixture of strange sporadic scuffling, as if feet were thrashing in gravel. Over this came dull thudding noises and then grunts and groans.

Joan, weary and sleepy, plodded ahead.

"Wait," Barbie cautioned, "I'm not so sure it's safe out there."

She steadied her exhausted friend and they both leaned against the side of the pipe, very still, as the sinister reverberations grew more intense.

"It sounds like a fight!" Joan said. Indeed, there were shouts and blows that rang through the tunnel echoing and magnified, and hinting of a bitter struggle.

"We can't stay here," Barbie said. "Someone may need our help." A cry of anguish reached their ears. The lighting died away.

Walking on tip-toe they covered the remaining fifty curving yards of pipe.

Ahead, the early morning sky appeared. To their eyes grown used to the darkness, the moon seemed very bright indeed. They had reached the mouth of the pipe. Barbie looked out cautiously. The lip

of the sewer emerged from the side of a small hill and emptied into a spume below.

"Come on," she said. "It's all right."

Barbie, followed by Joan, clambered out to the brush covered hill-side. Then they searched the terrain for signs of the struggle.

A slight flutter caught the corner of Joan's eye. She looked closer. The thin black mask, torn now, dangled from a branch. Then something else glittered in the moonlight. The blade of the knife was visible through the thick grass.

She called to Barbie and they peeped between the foliage.

The upraised dagger, the one wielded by the man in the mu-

seum, was clutched by a small hand. The body was hidden from view by the trees.

"This time," Barbie whispered, "we've got the upper hand, and Mr. Egan's alibis will do him no good."

They circled the area cautiously, watching for some sign of movement. After a moment, satisfied that Egan was unconscious and no one else was around they decided to approach the outstretched arm. They walked over to the stout tree shielding the body, and peeped around the trunk.

"Oh look!" Barbie exclaimed, catching sight of the sprawled figure. "It's not Mr. Egan, after all!"

Joan caught her breath. "It's Mr. Wilson!"

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CHAPTER IX THE VANISHED PICTURES

THE ENTIRE night now seemed strange and unreal. As they stared at the body, they were gripped by the unexpected shock of their discovery. Mr. Wilson was the intruder! In the moon glow his face was sickly. What mad motive governed his actions? Why had he scratched and cut the *left* hands?

"What ever could have happened?" Joan wondered.

Barbie reasoned that some one else must have been waiting to ambush Wilson as he left the tunnel. Who and why, she couldn't begin to figure out.

While they were trying to decide upon a course of action, Joan thought she noticed Mr. Wilson move the hand that

held the knife. Moments later he stirred and moaned slightly.

Frightened, the girls hid behind a large rock and awaited the next development. Mr. Wilson was a long time in regaining full consciousness. Then his breathing seemed to become more regular and he painfully pulled himself to a sitting position.

Mr. Wilson was taking on added strength. He forced himself to his feet and this time remained standing. Slowly at first, and then with increasing strides, he made his way down the side of the hill, holding to tree trunks for support.

A small two-lane highway girdled the base of the hill. Mr. Wilson, walking rapidly

and inhaling deep breaths, seemed fully recovered by the time he reached the road. He stopped for a moment to get his bearings. Then he hiked along the drainage ditch on one side of the road. The girls followed close behind.

Off to one side of the road, near a clump of trees, a large black sedan was parked. Although covered with dust, it was clearly an oversize model, the type of sedan used by bankers, diplomats and well heeled hoodlums.

Wilson reached into his pocket and produced a set of keys. Unlocking the door he entered the vehicle and started the engine. It sputtered momentarily, then caught and began to hum. It was a powerful engine with a loud throaty whine. Strangely, Barbie noticed, the passenger's features seemed distorted behind the window glass. Perhaps it was thick and bullet-proof. She shuddered at the thought.

Without waiting for the car to warm up, Mr. Wilson swung it sharply across the highway, swung into the downhill lane, and headed to Collins City.

No sooner had Mr. Wilson driven away than the girls realized that they were stranded.

"We were wondering how

Mr. Wilson would get to town," Joan said ironically, "and all the time we were the ones without transportation."

"We'll have to get a lift," Barbie proposed.

They sat by the roadside and decided to wait. Worn and weary, they fell asleep. When they awoke, the morning sun was shining on them, and the girls reached a decision to begin walking. They followed the road around to the base of the hill. Here where it joined a larger thoroughfare, a dismal sign greeted them. It told that the hill road was closed or repairs. They had been waiting in vain.

The larger road, however, had plenty of traffic. A kind-hearted truckman squealed his huge vehicle to a stop as soon as they began to wave.

"You poor kids," he said. "Lost in the woods, eh?" "Where do you live?"

"Please take us to Collins City," Barbie said. The man insisted on driving them directly to the door of the rooming house—a gesture for which both girls were extremely grateful.

"Don't wander off, next time," he called after them as they ran up the porch steps. The girls could hardly wait to



close the door behind them.

Upstairs, Mr. Lane was already dressed and was loading a fresh film cartridge into his camera when the girls burst into the room.

"I was just about to knock on your door to wake you," he said, without turning from his work. "You weren't home when I went to sleep last night. I retired quite early and I suppose I missed you when you came in. How was the movie?"

So Mr. Lane had thought the girls went to a movie in town! Barbie gave Joan a long relieved look. She had feared her father had remained up all night worrying.

"It's lucky you didn't knock just before, Dad. You'd have gotten a fright. We didn't come back last night."

"We went to the museum to see you, Mr. Lane," Joan added.

Richard Lane sneaked a look over his shoulder. He dropped the spool of film in horror.

"Barbie! Joanie! Oh my heavens! What's happened to you!" He felt for a chair behind him and collapsed into it, shocked by their bedraggled appearance.

"We're all right, Dad," Barbie reassured her father. "Our clothes will need a cleaning and Joan has no shoes but we're completely unharmed as you can see."

Mr. Lane needed some convincing.

"Joan is telling the truth," his daughter continued. "We did go to the museum late in the afternoon. You were gone."

"I left rather early. Didn't even stop to see Mr. Lemming in his office. I hadn't planned to stop work quite so soon but I was growing tired of photographing statues and I was very anxious to see how my close-ups of the mummy of Rama Khan turned out.

"I didn't know you were taking any shots of Rama-Khan's remains," said Barbie.

"It would have been a shame to pass up a perfectly

preserved and undamaged mummy," her father pointed out. "Every part of it has been captured close-up in high speed fine grain film. The enlargements will make a complete full page display. Let me show them to you."

He left the room and entered his temporary darkroom. "The prints should be dry now," he called. "Just a moment while I get them. I left them right on this tray somewhere."

Mr. Lane rummaged through his vast collection of test prints made in the two days he had been shooting the museum collection. He carried the entire tray into the room.

"I don't understand," he remarked, finally. "They were right on top, together with the negatives. Now they're gone!"

"Are you absolutely sure you left them in that tray?" Barbie asked.

"Yes. It's the widest one I have. I arranged them across the top when they were still damp." He shook his head sadly. "I don't understand it," he mused. "How could they have disappeared. I hope the curse of Rama-Khan doesn't include not wanting his picture taken," he remarked wryly.

"There is no curse," Barbie told her father. "I've proved it, together with Joan. We stayed in the museum half the night. We were locked in. We saw the intruder who slashed the mummies. There is a real man behind the curse and maybe some other people."

Her father listened with growing amazement as his daughter related the entire fantastic episode. She told of how they found themselves locked in the museum and how strange noises had awakened them at midnight. Mr. Lane visualized her description of the vandal, leaping from statue to statue, desecrating the mummies, and cutting great slashes into the paintings. And always the *left* hand was cut!

Then Joan recalled the details of the exhausting chase. She spoke of how they followed the intruder into the basement and through the ventilating shaft to the sewer. She re-lived the entire terror-filled journey through the slimy, rat-infested tunnels.

Barbie joined her in the surprising climax of the story. She concluded by telling of how they found Mr. Wilson, unconscious, and watched while he recovered and drove off.

When she finished her story, Mr. Lane was filled with astonishment. "This is unbelievably astounding," he said. "You girls really thought fast last night. I never dreamed such intrigue was going on. I'm very proud of both of you."

"It's little wonder the pictures are gone," Barbie said. "But we're all safe Daddy, and so are you and that's what really counts."

Her father smiled. "Now you girls run along and clean up. Barbie you'll want to look real pretty."

"What do you mean, Dad?"

"I have a surprise for you," he said, teasingly.

"Tell me, tell me," Barbie pleaded.

"I thought the article I'm working on might be able to kind of use a good picture of mummies' bones. Of course they're hidden behind the wrapping, and an ordinary camera is no good for that kind of work. You have to use x-rays. So Jack Prescott's coming here." Barbie grew elated. Jack Prescott was a young college student starting a brilliant career in medicine. He admired Barbie greatly. They were very good friends.

"Oh, Dad, is Jack really

coming out here?" Barbie cried excitedly.

"Yes. He's studying x-rays right now, you know, so he's making a special trip to help me take an x-ray picture of Rama-Khan for the magazine. He couldn't say for certain when he would arrive. I surely don't think you want him to see you in those clothes."

The girls flew to their room, heaped the mud-caked garments in a laundry bag, showered and put on their newest dresses. When they rejoined Barbie's father he was ready to leave for the museum.

"I have to continue my shooting schedule," he said. "But I've been thinking about that Mr. Wilson and the mysterious woman."

"Dad, I'm convinced Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Suleiman are somehow in league against us," Barbie said. "They're out to make trouble."

"We should keep these suspects under surveillance," her father said. "While I'm at the museum, I want Mr. Wilson's rooming house watched. Do you girls think you can manage to keep in the shadows, out of sight, and find out who enters and leaves that building?"

Barbie's heart leaped joy-

fully at the assignment. They wouldavenue the museum, help her father and deal roundly with the scoundrels.

"I'm placing a good deal of responsibility in you and Joan," Mr. Lane said.

"Don't worry about us, Dad," she reassured him. "We'll be the quietest and best little detectives you ever had."

"All right," he said. "And first you can drive me to the museum."

Next to helping in the dark-room and sleuthing when her father was in trouble with greedy, sinister people, Barbie loved few chores as much as the privilege of driving the family car for her dad. She navigated with great care through the streets of Collins City and parked easily in the museum driveway.

Her father got out and came around to her window. "Take over," he told her. "Park at least a block from the rooming house Wilson is staying in. Be sure he doesn't see you."

The realization that they could use the car for the remainder of the day filled Barbie and Joan with pride. Mr. Lane realized the tremendous importance of their work to the project. He wanted them to be able to report back at

once if the need arose.

Barbie waved a reassuring farewell and Richard Lane climbed the museum steps, camera in hand, and walked in beneath the columns.

Barbie and Joan tingled with excitement. As the car began to move they felt they were on their way to a great adventure which would end in a speedy triumph of justice and an end to the worries of the museum.

As her father had directed, Barbie left the car at a distance from the house where Wilson had rented a room.

Unobserved, they sauntered along the quiet street, keeping behind trees and close to parked automobiles. When they reached the rooming house it displayed no signs of life. All the shades were drawn. They moved closer to view the driveway.

"There's his car!" Joan said, pointing. Mr. Wilson's great sedan, now cleaned of the dust, was poised, long and dignified, in the driveway.

"He must be in the house," Barbie deduced. They hurried across the street and took up a position alongside a low brick wall that surrounded the garden.

"We'll wait here," Joan sug-

grated. Barbie thought this would be a good plan. Lunchtime was so near so she stayed alone while Joan purchased sandwiches for them. They ate and settled down to wait. The afternoon passed slowly and the sun sank below the horizon. Within the house nothing stirred. The front door never opened.

"Do you think he went away without his car?" Joan wondered. Barbie agreed that this was a possibility. They waited another half hour and when no one appeared, decided to chance a closer look under cover of the approaching darkness.

Barbie climbed over the low wall and helped Joan over. Then they scampered across the lawn.

"Mr. Wilson's room must be on the first floor," Joan observed. "His wife has to use a wheel chair."

"Joan, you're going to make a good detective," Barbie said.

They reached the white frame side of the house and paused beneath a window.

Barbie listened. "We're in luck," she said. "Our very first window! I hear Mr. Wilson inside."

Joan stood on tiptoe and

pressed her ear close to the building. "That's Mr. Wilson's voice all right and my goodness he seems excited. But he isn't talking English. What odd sounds he's making!"

"That must be Egyptian," Barbie said. "I hear the woman answering. She's talking in that same language. She sounds like that Mrs. Suleiman, for sure!"

The idea seemed to hit both girls simultaneously. If Wilson and Mrs. Suleiman were here, perhaps the curiosity shop was unguarded!

"Now is our chance to search her store for clues," Joan said.

Barbie hesitated. Her father's instructions had been precise. "Dad did tell us to stay here," she reminded Joan.

"But this may be our only chance," Joan protested.

Barbie weighed the possibilities in her mind. Yes, Mr. Lane would probably approve of their making the search, she decided.

"Come on," she said. "Let's go!"

They crept out of the garden, walked casually down the street and then bolted for the car. In a matter of moments they were on the road to Milltown.



CHAPTER X

TRAPPED

BARBIE cruised slowly through the shopping area while Joan watched for the street on which Mrs. Suleiman's Curiosity Shop was located. The old fashioned front with its quaint lettering stood out easily from the surrounding stores. When they passed in front Joan studied the dark windows for some sign of activity. The business appeared to be closed for the night. Joan knew she could not be positive that the store was closed until they completed a closer inspection.

Barbie placed the car in a municipal shoppers lot and the two girls strolled unobtrusively toward Mrs. Suleiman's.

Barbie tried the door. It was locked. She pressed her face

against the little window in the door. Using her hand to block the reflected street lights, she searched the interior as best she could to assure herself that the shop was really unoccupied.

Moving on, she joined Joan, who was pretending to be fascinated by a catcher's mitt displayed in a sporting goods store window.

"As far as I can make out, there's no one in the shop," Barbie reported. Joan nodded, as if discussing the newest designs in swimsuits. Barbie then suggested they walk through the alley which passed the rear room of the Egyptian woman's establishment.

They cautiously approached its narrow entrance located between two buildings. As luck

would have it, the alleyway was deserted.

The curiosity shop was easily distinguished from behind. Its poorly kept exterior set it apart from the other businesses. The girls were overjoyed to see that the neglected store had a window in the rear. Its name streaked with dirt, the window dangled in a rotting sash, held only by flimsy counterweighted cords.

Joan simply tugged once and the old window lifted away. The girls went into action. Barbie boosted Joan over the sill. The younger girl landed on her feet and, in turn, placed a chair by the window and helped Barbie across.

They turned on the lamp and began examining the contents of the back room. A sturdy roll-top desk with a built-in lamp and telephone stood open against one wall.

Barbie's first thought was to rummage through the papers in the hope of finding something in English that would provide them with a clue.

No sooner had they begun to sort the papers than the telephone jangled.

The ring was persistent. Barbie summoned all her courage and lifted the receiver. "I must remember how Mrs. Suleiman

talks," she told herself, praying that the person at the other end would speak English.

"Hello, hello is that you?" a man's angry voice demanded.

"Yeees," said Barbie, quaking, as she imitated Mrs. Suleiman.

"What took you so long to answer?" the voice asked.

The person at the other end of the line sounded like Egan. Barbie thought quickly. "I was waiting on coostimer," she replied in a heavily accented voice.

"All right. Now listen. I've stolen the photographs—all of them. So don't worry. I'm taking them to the old man's place. Got that?"

"Yeees."

The receiver at the other end clicked hard as it was replaced. The call was completed.

"I'm sure that was Mr. Egan," Barbie told Joan. "He mentioned stolen photographs, and said he was taking them to the old man's place."

"That must be Mr. Wilson's."

"We've got to work fast," Barbie said. "When he gets there he'll find he wasn't talking to Mrs. Suleiman after all."

Joan pulled the drawers from the desk and rapidly

scanned their contents while Barbie sorted the papers lying on the desk top into two groups. Those notes with any English writing on them or containing recognizable pictures she placed in one pile. The totally illegible script was heaped in the second. The girls could not work too rapidly for fear of overlooking some important note or record in the dim room.

Joan had no luck with the material crammed into the drawers. Most of the papers were simple business receipt forms and bills. Her companion fared no better with the first three batches of material. Much of it was wrinkled and yellow, crumbling with age. Joan helped her sift through the mass of writing.

"Wait! Catch that!" Barbie instructed. A small newspaper clipping had slipped from between two larger sheets of paper and was falling to the floor.

Joan deftly scooped it up and held it against the lamp light. It was a recent clipping and carried an Egyptian dateline. They pored over the story, their interest growing with each line. It told of a great loss suffered by Princess Nejla, an extremely popular and well-favored personage in one branch of the royal family

of Egypt. Her set of precious ancient jewels, rivalling in worth the entire present-day treasury of that near eastern nation, had been stolen from her vault. The gems, originally from the diadems of the ancient high priests, had been in her family for countless centuries. So deeply revered were the stones among many sects of religious nomads, the newspaper account related, that the loss had not been publicly announced in Egypt and existed only as a rumor. The story went on to say that if the theft became known, riots and bloodshed might follow.

Deeply engrossed in the press report, the girls did not hear the night latch being slipped back on the front door. Only when the rusty hinges creaked, did they realize someone was entering the shop.

"Quick, behind that furniture," Barbie instructed, spreading the papers around the desk. They ducked beneath a partly completed cabinet and managed to wedge themselves in between the long screw clamps holding the piece together.

The back room door was pushed open briskly. The frightening bulk of Johnson, the oversized clerk, appeared.

Seeing the desk lamp glowing, a feeling of rage crept over his face. He examined the desk and then let his eyes wander over the room. The girls were petrified. His gaze came to rest on the cabinet. He twisted his mouth into a grimace, hesitated for a moment, and then looked elsewhere. Joan thought he would never leave. She felt she was going to sneeze out managed to stifle the impulse. Finally, Johnson turned off the light and returned to the show-room. The girls' eyes followed his movements. Would he close the door behind him? Happily, he did. Barbie and Joan emerged from their hiding place, greatly relieved that they had not been detected.

They listened for Mr. Johnson. Hearing nothing, the girls moved quietly towards the window. Barbie wondered if Johnson had noticed it was open. He had given no indication of seeing the raised pane. He was probably a dull-witted person, she decided.

Joan swung her legs over the sill and let herself down into the alley. Barbie followed suit. Keeping close by the fence, they decided to make a run for the car before chanc-

ing another encounter with the massive assistant.

Barbie led the way. She had not gone far when she realized Joan was not behind her. Filled with apprehension and dread, she turned back. The alley was deserted. Near a break in the fence she heard a muffled cry. Then a huge hairy hand reached through and clamped her mouth shut.

"Haw! Got 'em both!" a voice grunted. Barbie struggled as the hand, displaying immense strength, lifted her through the opening.

Johnson had seized them both! He leered at his captives and began to drag them along. Joan scratched and kicked while Barbie flailed with her fists. Their resistance was to no avail. The powerful man lifted them, one at a time and pitched them in through the window. They landed, unharmed on the floor. Johnson squeezed his bulk through the opening with surprising agility.

They looked up at him with fright in their eyes.

"Soon," he warned, shaking his huge fist close to their faces, "Mrs. Suleiman comes. Then . . . we decide what to do with you!"



CHAPTER XI

IN DEADLY PERIL

JOHNSON barricaded the window, shoving several chests against it and piling on broken table legs and other debris.

"Mistress, she be very angry," he warned gruffly. "She yell at me because of you. I fix. Just wait. I get even."

Their captor placed himself between his prisoners and the door and sat with folded hands. He constantly berated himself for his carelessness. With every passing noise he started and looked nervously to see if Mrs. Suleiman were arriving.

The hour grew later. There was no sign of Mrs. Suleiman. Johnson's patience was gone. He snatched the telephone and dialed a number. His pudgy hands gripped the receiver in a

clumsy manner. The girls could hear a telephone ringing at the other end. Then the ringing ceased, and they could hear a high pitched woman's voice jabbering in annoyance at the other end.

"This Johnson. You come," he said. The distant chattering began at a faster rate.

"No." The clerk's voice shook. "Tomorrow no good. You come now. Catch girl-snoops." Raging, he flung the telephone into a corner.

The two girls listened and watched intently. The enemy camp showed signs of division and a feud could really come in handy.

"She say she been sleeping all day!" Johnson was snarling with resentment. Joan and Bar-

bie eyed each other knowingly. Mrs. Suleiman had lied to her benchman. Why, they had heard her talking to Mr. Wilson in Collins City that very afternoon! The realization increased their hope. Mrs. Suleiman would need time, at least as much as they had taken, for the trip to Milltown. They huddled against the cabinets and began to plan.

But only a few minutes passed before the door crashed open. The girls looked up, startled beyond belief. Mrs. Suleiman flew into the shop, a wrinkled bundle of pent-up fury. Catching sight of the girls, she exploded in rage. She stomped and ranted.

"Get them out of here, you fool! Don't you know any better than to keep them here? Dolt! Idiot! To the mines! To the mines! And be quick about it!"

Barbie's heart sank. She remembered the hundreds of decaying shafts plunging at odd angles into the hills outside Milltown. Beneath the surface, who knew how many thousands of excavations wandered through exhausted veins of coal? Rescuers would require many days to search even one mine.

Johnson hovered around lit-

tle Mrs. Suleiman, trying to placate her.

"On your way," she ordered. "I'll meet you there later with all the instructions. The truck is out front!"

The gigantic clerk lifted the girls, one under each arm, and carried them out front, despite their frantic resistance. It was quite late now and the dark, small-town streets empty. A small closed furniture pick-up truck was parked in front of the door. Johnson opened the rear loading gangs and tossed the girls into the heavily padded, windowless interior. The doors slammed shut, the lock turned, and the girls felt the truck begin to move.

The ride was shaky and the hard rolling vehicle provided its share of jolts and bumps. During the smoother stretches of the journey the girls ran their hands over the walls of their rolling cell. Beneath the padding, the metal walls were seamless and offered no hope of escape. The truck made a sudden turn, throwing both girls to the floor. Now they were in the hills; they could feel the truck climbing. From the sounds, the engine threatened to stall.

Miraculously, they reached the mine shaft. They felt them-

selves on level ground once more. The rear doors jerked open, and Johnson, holding a lantern before him, peered inside.

"You come out!" he ordered. The girls stumbled from the truck. They were high on a hillside swept by a chilling wind.

Johnson pushed the girls along. He began to whistle. Now he was enjoying his job. Mrs. Suleiman would be pleased that he followed her orders.

The mine entrance had been cut into the wall of the hill at an almost horizontal angle. Overhead a rusting metal framework supported the wood covered conveyor belt system that had once hauled the coal from the interior of the mine. They passed beneath the structure, crossed through a shack containing the controls to the conveyor belt and entered the mine shaft. Over a small bridge a short way in from the opening they turned and took a decided slope down. Johnson hurried the girls and they began to wonder how far into the mine they would descend. He made a number of turns and twists, following first one passage and then another.

They entered a cavernous



room. Johnson walked in a methodical circuit of the room, stopping at little niches cut in the wall, to light candles.

The flickering lights illuminated several rough hewn log chairs and a wooden table. Johnson sat down at the table and pointed for the girls to seat themselves on the other chairs.

By this time Barbie had formulated her plan of action. They would get as much information as possible from Johnson and try to turn him against his employer with their jibing questions. She fired her first question without warning.

"Why doesn't Mrs. Suleiman trust you, Johnson?" Barbie asked.

"Who says so? That's a lie!" he bellowed. He was responding to the bait.

"Well, she never let you do the really important work."

"This work is *very* important!" he shouted.

"But it's not as important as the work at the museum," Barbie shot back. "They don't let you go to the museum."

"Well, Egan, he knows how to get in. That's only reason they hire him. You believe me!"

"Oh yes, we believe you," Barbie said. So it was true! Egan was working for Mrs. Suleiman. But then where did Mr. Wilson fit in? Johnson seemed to be thinking now. She waited for another opening.

"Besides," he began again in an angry tone of voice, "Mrs. Suleiman she can only follow orders. She likes me. She must listen to the boss. Maybe old man tells her Johnson no good."

Old man! The picture was coming into focus, clearly. Wilson, of course, was the old man. They were all under his orders. Egan was the expert at getting in and out of the museum to carry out the assignments through Mrs. Suleiman. But what kind of assignment would require such odd actions as scratching the left hands on the paintings and statues in the museum? Barbie was more puzzled than ever.

Johnson stepped out into the mine tunnel and watched for Mrs. Suleiman. "Don't try leaving," he warned. "I'm outside."

The girls talked in excited whispers. Everything was clear now—or was it?

"I still can't figure it out," Joan puzzled. "All these people are acting very mysterious, sneaking into museums, disguising themselves, slashing mummies, and now kidnapping us. What's behind it all? Why should anyone hire Mrs. Suleiman to have someone sneak into the museum and make all those mysterious scratches in the first place."

Barbie sorted the jumble of events in her mind. Then she remembered how pointless some of the slashings had seemed at the time. The statues and paintings had been hacked mercilessly. Only the mummies were cut with care.

"I have an idea!" she told her friend. "Suppose something were hidden in the left hand of just one mummy. Egan didn't know which mummy it was. He would have to slash every one in the exhibit. From the destruction it would be obvious that he was looking for something. But if he were to cut the statues and paintings

as well, his entire search would be passed off as senseless vandalism. No one would dream he was really interested only in the mummies."

"Yes," exclaimed Joan. "Maybe that's what it is!"

"But Egan's first attempt was a failure," Barbie continued. "He missed whatever it was he was hunting for. So Mr. Wilson tried it the second time. When we scared him away he had searched all the mummies except the case containing Rama-Khan. And he still hadn't found anything! So whatever they're looking for must be hidden in the hand of Rama-Khan and now they know it. They don't even have to cut the bandages open. They can unwrap it at their leisure, complete their mission, and retie the bandages."

"No wonder your father's pictures were stolen," Joan added. "He had closeups of every part of the mummy. If sometime later, the photograph of the left hand were ever compared with the mummy itself, it would be obvious someone had tampered with the wrappings!"

Barbie was desperate. "We've got to get out of here right away and tell my Dad and Mr. Lemming to pick up

Mr. Wilson."

Before they could put any plan into action, Johnson re-entered the room. Mrs. Suleiman was with him, sharp-tongued and bitter.

"Who could have thought they would do such a thing! The fools! I knew that photographer would do us no good."

"Do you know what happened, Johnson? They're going to photograph that mummy with an x-ray machine. Some young upstart has arrived in town with all the equipment. When they turn on the beam tomorrow you know what they'll find! We can't wait. We've got to act tonight! I'm getting everyone together. The raid is all set. Stay here and don't let those girls out of your sight for an instant!"

The vicious little woman glared venomously for a moment at Barbie and Joan and stormed out.

So Jack had arrived! Now the danger was immediate. Barbie waited until she was sure Mrs. Suleiman was out of the tunnel and then said, "I see you're missing out on all the excitement again, Mr. Johnson."

"I told you, this job is important!" he reported.

"Then be on your toes," Joan

said.

"Say, what do you use that old conveyor belt outside for?" Barbie asked.

"We don't. It came with the mine."

"Well, it's working now." Barbie winked at Joan.

"Wha—? I don't hear anything!" He listened for a sound from the surface.

"It's getting louder," Barbie said.

Johnson ran from the room and rushed into the tunnel outside. Joan picked up a lump of coal and sent it flying as far as she could in one of the mine shafts.

"There *is* something!" Johnson shouted. He tore down the shaft. Barbie seized the lantern and the girls bounded for safety.

They scrambled up the sloping shaft, pausing only for moments as Barbie recalled the route. A furious roar told them Johnson had discovered that he was tricked! They heard him coming after them.

"Faster, Joan, faster," Barbie urged.

"I can't" Joan said.

"It's just a little way ahead; if we can make it we can hide outside. We'll never find us!"

Joan felt a surge of strength and the girls flew along the tunnel. They began to outdistance their pursuer. Johnson's labored run and fuming shouts were fading behind. Then the entrance was ahead. They raced past the conveyor and through the control shack.

"Barbie help!" Joan called. She had tripped against one of the conveyor covers. Barbie stopped and assisted Joan to her feet.

"Oh, I've done it, I've wrenched my ankle, I think." Joan was in tears.

Johnson was closing the gap fast. They could hear him pounding across the little bridge.

"Lean on me" Barbie said.

The girls struggled forward. Less than five feet separated them from the sheltering night.

"We've got to make it," Barbie said.

Johnson was shouting for them to stop. They were only one step from safety when Joan looked up and shrieked a warning. Barbie gasped. A towering figure loomed before them. In his upraised hand an immense club was poised.

Before they could duck, the weapon descended.



CHAPTER XII

A ROYAL REWARD

JOAN AND Barbie cowed under the impending blow. The club whistled past their ears and connected with a resounding crack. A body fell, the tremendous impact echoing and re-echoing. Amidst the confusion, Barbie dropped the lantern. It rolled down the hill, smashed against a tree and flared up, igniting the tree.

In the glare of the flames, Joan saw Barbie standing next to the figure armed with the club. It was Mr. Wilson! Johnson, unconscious, was doubled over in a heap before them.

"I seem to have arrived just in time," Wilson was saying. "You girls weren't doing any too well in that chase. You're lucky I trailed Mrs. Suleiman to this mine. We might never

have found you."

Barbie was totally confused. "I don't understand at all," she said with hostility and suspicion in her voice. "Why should you have had to follow Mrs. Suleiman? Did you suspect your hireling of a double-cross?"

"My hireling? Indeed!"

"Don't deny it," Barbie warned. "We know that Mrs. Suleiman and the woman behind that black veil are the same person! You might as well admit everything!"

To their surprise Mr. Wilson reacted as if something was uproariously funny.

"What's the joke?" Joan demanded.

"Come, I'll show you," he replied. "The time has come for you to meet the lady in

black."

The girls followed Mr. Wilson to the other side of the conveyor. Drawn up to the structure was the huge black limousine, its glistening sides reflecting the light of the nearby blaze.

Curtains were drawn over the rear windows.

Wilson opened the door to the passenger compartment. The woman dressed in black emerged, took Mr. Wilson's hand and stepped gracefully to the ground.

With a sweeping movement, the woman removed her black veil. A young girl stood before them. She had a face of classic beauty and carried herself with noble bearing.

"Her Royal Highness, Princess Nejla of Egypt," was Mr. Wilson's introduction.

Noting their bewildered faces he reached into his pocket. "I believe I owe you both a number of explanations," he said, removing a tiny leather dossier case from an inner compartment of his wallet. He opened the case and produced a set of printed credentials and a small badge.

"A...detective. You're a private investigator," Barbie stammered.

"Now you realize why I was

upset when I found my wallet missing."

"But we followed you out of the museum," Joan said. "You cut up the left hands of the exhibits and then escaped through the tunnel. We found you unconscious outside and saw you make your getaway."

Wilson winced at the thought of his painful bruise. "You were following Egan," he said. "I was waiting to surprise him at the end of the tunnel, only he surprised me. He jumped me while my back was turned for a moment. Then he made his escape."

"I'm still confused," Barbie admitted. "Why were you waiting for him?"

"Because he works for Mrs. Suleiman. You see, I am in the employ of Princess Nejla," he continued. "We're trying to locate her stolen royal jewels. Mrs. Suleiman runs an international smuggling station in her shop. The antiques are strictly a front. She has many contacts in the Egyptian underground. We know for certain that the jewels were somehow smuggled out of that country and shipped here. Just how it was accomplished we haven't been able to figure out as yet. We must get to those jewels before Mrs. Suleiman can dis-

pose of them. We've watched her carefully. She hasn't gotten her hands on them yet."

"I know where the jewels are, Mr. Wilson," Barbie declared. "You'll have to work fast if you want to get to them before she does. They're hidden in the left hand of the mummy of Rama-Khan. We overheard Mrs. Suleiman say there would be a raid on the museum tonight!"

"Then we haven't a moment to lose!" Wilson said. He quickly checked the scene around them. The fire was dwindling and could not spread beyond the bare hillside. Johnson would be unconscious for several hours. He could be picked up later.

Milltown was reached quickly. They hurtled through the deserted streets and streaked for Collins City. Wilson drove directly to the Museum. The building was ablaze with light as the black sedan pulled into the driveway. They bounded up the stairs.

Barbie's father and Mr. Lemming were standing within the rotunda. Jack Prescott was with them.

"Dad! Jack!" Barbie exclaimed, running to them. Her father had an unusually grave look in his eyes. "The mummy

of Rama-Khan has been stolen," he said.

They were too late. Barbie introduced the princess Nejla and explained Mr. Wilson's real identity and what had happened at the curiosity shop. She told how they had been kidnapped and imprisoned in the mine and how Mr. Wilson had saved them from Johnson.

"I'm grateful to you for my daughter's safety and that of her friend," Mr. Lane told the detective.

"That's perfectly all right. It's one of the more rewarding aspects of a detective's life to be able to help people," Mr. Wilson said. "Right now we've got to locate that mummy. We know Mrs. Suleiman and Egan took the Rama-Khan remains. By now they've made their escape through a sewer beneath the museum. They wouldn't dare return to the shop and certainly the mine is out of the question. Where did they go?"

Barbie was deep in thought. "I think I have it!" she said. "Joan and I went to question Egan's sister Sarah, the maid at Mr. Abercrombie's house. Sarah swore to us she hadn't seen her brother, that he was dead. Yet we saw him leaving the Abercrombie residence just before we spoke to her. If he

wasn't visiting Sarah, he must have been there to see Mr. Abercrombie. Then when I spoke to Mr. Egan on the telephone he said he was taking the photographs to 'the old man'. Mr. Johnson also spoke of an old man being the ring-leader behind the smuggling activities. We thought he meant Mr. Wilson. Now it can only be one person—Mr. Abercrombie!"

They all hurried from the building and entered the big foreign car. Following Barbie's directions, they sped into the suburbs.

The speeding sedan roared up the hedged entranceway and squealed to a halt before the front terrace. Wilson lunged at the door. It flew open. The men searched the first floor. Abercrombie was nowhere to be seen. Led by Barbie they raced up the curved hall stairway and through the corridors lined with paintings. At the young girl's instructions, they made directly for the vaulted half-room.

Mr. Abercrombie was standing in the doorway of the room, smartly attired in a tuxedo. He seemed perfectly at ease, and amused at their haste.

"Good evening," he said with a smile. When no one replied the red-faced gentleman

began to speak once more. "It is quite late for a celebration you know. What's the occasion?"

"We're here for the royal jewels of Princess Nejla," Wilson said, curtly.

"You're about four thousand miles off course," Abercrombie replied. "I read about them once. They're in the royal stronghold in Egypt."

"They're here in this house!" Richard Lane asserted, "in the mummy of Rama-Khan."

Abercrombie paled. "Mr. Lemming. You're my friend. You know me. Tell them all I've done. Tell them how I helped build the museum, how you named a gallery after me."

"Everything you've ever done has added to the glory of your name," Lemming snapped. "You wanted to become the biggest trustee so you bought your way to the top. Then you weren't satisfied. You had to have the richest collections of gems, all to yourself!"

Barbie thought she detected a noise behind the metal door of the vault. It was as if someone had bumped against it from the other side. She watched for her chance.

Abercrombie, fuming at the charges, approached Mr. Lemming. "Now look here," he

ranted. "I demand that you retract your preposterous charge, at once." He waved a threatening fist in Lemming's face.

Barbie darted across the room and fell with all her might against the vault door. It opened and she tumbled into the other side of the half-room.

Wilson grabbed for his shoulder automatic.

Knives in hand, Egan and Mrs. Suleiman were hunched over the mummy of Ramsa-Khan, outstretched on a table beneath them.

"Drop your knives," Wilson commanded.

The two plotters snarled their surprise. Egan made as if to grab Barbie, then thought the better of it and his weapon clattered to the floor. Mrs. Suleiman then let her dagger fall and raised her hands together with her accomplice.

Wilson stepped forward, reached into the gauze pocket formed by the wrappings over the left hand of the mummy. "Here are your jewels, princess," he said, holding aloft the glittering stones.

The young princess stepped forward. "I am eternally grateful to all of you" she said.

"And especially to those brave young women who risked such danger for me. By way of reward I will first donate one of the stones to the museum's permanent collection.

"And to you, Barbie and Joan, anything Egypt can do will not be enough. How would you like to visit the Pyramids, see a real Sphinx. . . ."

"I don't want to seem ungrateful," Joan began, "but. . . ."

Barbie leaned over and whispered in the ear of the princess.

"Oh, I have just the thing," the royal young woman smiled graciously. "I always travel with several cosmetic cases. They are exact replicas of the jeweled chests in which the royal women of the early dynasties kept their ointments and perfumes. I have one for each of you."

"Gosh, wait till the girls at school see this!" Joan exulted.

Barbie laughed. "Come on, Cleopatra," she said. "We'd better get some sleep. Tomorrow, we're going on a vacation!"

THE END

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